

The Value of Latin: A Personal Perspective and Other Notes

The benefits of studying Latin are numerous. Students not only learn a language whose rich literature had a significant influence upon the history of writing in various genres, but they also come face to face with an important world culture. This culture has impacted a large geographical area touching 4 continents, and its study helps students better understand some of our American institutions and government, discuss the long history of some socio-economic issues, and grasp certain aspects of the relationship between North and South America and Europe over the past 500 years. Because the Roman Empire was a nation made up of many provinces populated by a multicultural society, students can also make correlations to present day political and social situations and world events. The history and traditions of the Christian church are also tied to Roman history and culture and especially the use of the Latin language.

Learning the language of Latin has been shown to build students' verbal abilities as well as develop skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis. The logical structure of the Latin makes one think about how language works. In addition, we still use the poetic and rhetorical devices of Greco-Roman origin in English writing and public speaking. Ancient Greek and Roman writers literally set the bar in the development of almost every genre of English literature. Allusions to and borrowing from Greco-Roman myths and legends are also common in current literature and film.

Over half of English vocabulary is derived from Latin and 90% of English words longer than 2 syllables are Latin-based! This is why a knowledge of Latin and Greek roots is part of upper elementary and middle grades content standards in most states and stressed in the Common Core Standards. The extent of one's vocabulary directly affects communication skills, which have been shown to be the single most important factor to career success – no matter what job one chooses. And of course in medicine and the sciences, there are literally millions of words, terms and names that are based directly on Latin. And Latin still provides common terminology for international communication. Many legal terms are Latin and our legal system has interesting connections to Roman law. Latin is also valuable, because it is an excellent base for learning other Romance languages, whose vocabularies are about 80% Latin.

Latin instruction has risen in some areas and fallen in others, due mainly to budget deficits, but across the nation it is holding on. It is taught in public, public magnet, private, and home schools, even to the point that during the last decade some areas of the country have not been able to find enough teachers! Talented teachers use a wide variety of methods and approaches to attract and accommodate students, from oral usage and comprehensible input to podcasting and online media. These creative teaching strategies also help Latin students build their 21st Century Skills, skills that will benefit them their whole life, no matter what career they choose. Many Latin texts have been updated and teachers often employ all the newest technologies.

Students may also choose to participate in local and regional activities, as well. Some schools host local certamen quiz-bowl contests. There are a number of national and international contests for Latin students. Over 155,000 students in the US and 20 other countries took one of the international contests last year. More than 50,000 students are active in their local Latin clubs at junior and senior high schools. Students can choose to attend regional, state and national events, if they wish.

Author W. H. Jarold wrote for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics Washington DC. Educational Resources Information Center, "In addition, data from the Admission Testing Program of the College Board show a definite positive correlation between Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and the study of [world] languages. In one recent test group, for example, students who.....had taken only one year of a [world] language had slightly higher scores in reading and math, whereas students with two years of [world] language showed more dramatic increases. Each additional year of language study brought a further rise in scores."

Jarold also stated that a "second language is now becoming a vital part of the basic preparation for an increasing number of careers. Even in those cases where the knowledge of a second language does not help graduates obtain a first job, many report that their [world] language skills often enhance their mobility and improve their chances for promotion.....they also have further tangible advantages in the job market. In a recent study that sought to ascertain which college courses had been most valuable for people who were employed in the business world, graduates pointed not only to career-oriented courses such as business management, but also to people-oriented subjects like psychology, and to classes that had helped them to develop communication skills. World language students, whose courses focus heavily on this aspect of learning, often possess outstanding communication skills, both written and oral. Furthermore, recent trends in the job marketplace indicate a

revived recognition of the value of liberal arts training in general in an employee's career preparation."

NAEP stated in 2012 that "*Due to an interest in strengthening verbal and critical thinking skills.... "Latin [is] on the rise. Among [public] elementary schools that teach languages, Latin instruction has [doubled] in the past ten years!"*" (The Nation's Report Card is part of the U.S. Department of Education and is mandated by Congress.)

The College Board data shows Latin in relation to other subject areas college-bound students have pursued. It also calculates correlations between SAT scores and the length of study of certain subjects, including English, math, biological sciences, physical sciences, and social studies and found noticeable benefits. Year after year, Latin students rank first in Verbal/Critical Reading and often first in Writing in relation to other upper level college-bound students.

On a higher level, results were also positive in favor of Latin for the GRE for college seniors testing for graduate school (last data:2008-2012). *Classical Language/Latin majors scored the highest on verbal and quantitative sections of all language majors and the highest on verbal of all of 300 major college fields of study listed! (619 Ave. Verbal)*

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